

*Interviewer:* I forgot when people tell me I've got to do that. That's sort of like my memory.

*Sid Conley:* You tell me when you're ready.

*Interviewer:* Ok.

*Female:* You're can't miss – you're couldn't miss Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ place at all. You got that porch chairs just like these on her porch back on the left here the mother is dead.

*Interviewer:* Ok.

*Female:* Yeah. And he had a big old porch like this and you can see if from the highway. You can see their porch and their chairs and everything.

*Sid Conley:* House is trimmed in white and blue.

*Female:* There's a tree stands right by the lower end of the house.

*Interviewer:* Ok. Was he, was he working in the mines around here?

*Sid Conley:* Oh yeah, he's working in the mines. He was an organizer. He was a \_\_\_\_\_ organizer.

*Female:* He worked with Sid before they retired.

*Sid Conley:* Me and him worked together. He's a little older than I am about ten years. But still I went to work early in the mines. I went to work in 1918.

*Interviewer:* How old are you?

*Sid Conley:* I'm 70.

*Female:* He's ten years older than Sid is.

*Sid Conley:* He's 80. He was 80 in August, on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of August he was 80.

*Interviewer:* So you were just 16 when you went into the mines? Is that right?

*Sid Conley:* I was young.

*Interviewer:* Were you working around here? Interval: 0:00 – 1:08

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*Sid Conley:* No. I retired in '58.

*Interviewer:* No. I mean when you went into the mines. Were you working for Allen Creek?

*Sid Conley:* Yes. Did all of my work just practically for all my life. Worked there all of my life.

*Female:* You're talking \_\_\_\_.

*Interviewer:* Lived here in Mudfork?

*Sid Conley:* Lived right here in Mudfork.

*Female:* Been right here about 46 years.

*Sid Conley:* Been here practically all our lives.

*Interviewer:* You know, the Workman's were telling me that there was a union organized here real early. I thought that most of the union in Logan County was organized after Franklin Roosevelt. But I guess it was earlier.

*Sid Conley:* That's right. That's right. I'm pretty near as old as he is and I've worked in mines – I worked in a mine before he did. He worked as contract work. I worked in the mines before he did. He did contract – I mean outside work, worked on the construction work when they was building this railroad down here. And he maintained, worked on railroad tracks, and cleaned and fixed the railroad tracks and stuff like that for quite some years. He never went in the mines for some time after I did. And he never worked inside, maybe about eight or ten years, nine or ten years.

*Interviewer:* When you started work down here was this a union mine?

*Sid Conley:* No. Union never came in here till after Roosevelt was left. They tried to get in here and they wouldn't let them in. They had war to kill –

*Female:* They did not have union – how many years have there been union –

*Sid Conley:* That was 19 – I was working down there, 19 on top of the mountain, dropping coal. They come over and wanted me to sign the \_\_\_\_\_. I told them no, I wouldn't sign this. They said you're

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going to sign it or you won't work. And I said this is going to have to work. I wasn't married at that time. I was signing it. I thought \_\_\_\_\_ and I said I'll just go ahead. When I went home and they went over there and tried to drag me and take me as a deputy to fight the union.

*Interviewer:* Was that in the Battle of Blair Mountain there?

*Sid Conley:* Yes. Battle of Blair Mountain.

*Interviewer:* They tried to get you to go up there and –

*Sid Conley:* They tried to get me to go and I wouldn't go.

*Female:* Not very many around here went I don't think at that time.

*Sid Conley:* They was –

*Interviewer:* Why was the reason that you didn't go up there?

*Sid Conley:* Because I'd read – I'd had the literature and I'd heard all about the union before this. There was a friend of mine that worked with me and helped me on track. I was a track man, laid track. And there was a friend of mine, a Cooper. And had been over in Pennsylvania and come back. He was some older than I was. He'd been over in Pennsylvania and come back and he was going from one place to another. He was an organizer, getting assembly to the men to see whether they could organize or not.

And he come one mine work a month and then he'd go to another mine and work a month so he could gather information. His name – he was a Cooper. But I forget that man's name. That was 19 – that was 1919 I believe it was, 1919 \_\_\_\_\_. Well, we never got to – went on and went on and went on and had that big fight and that massacre and everything and went on. And every time they'd start in here they'd get a lot of them killed, kill a lot. Oh there was quite a few men killed in that fight on Blair Mountain.. Got killed, shot, and wounded. Quite a few of them.

*Female:* See you were at \_\_\_\_\_ all the time without a union. You worked ten or eleven.

*Sid Conley:* We had a man come just like you did, come here and talk with us. And I was going and working. I was going to work before daylight and I got back just when I could get back. Sometimes – you stayed there and you got your work done. If it took you 14 hours you

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stayed there and if you got it done in 8 hours you come home and if you got it done in 10 you come home.

*Female:* Went around 5:00 for the men to go to work in the morning.

*Sid Conley:* She'd get up in the morning at 4:00 and get my breakfast for me to go to work and it would be maybe 9:00 at night, children all in bed asleep and I'd come back.

*Interviewer:* You didn't a lot of times see daylight until Sunday.

*Sid Conley:* On the weekends.

*Female:* That's the way it was.

*Sid Conley:* When we's off. Well, I talked to the boss. I go to the union meeting and I still am a member. And I tell the boys, boys you better hold what you got because you don't know what it took to get it. It took blood. And it took – we had to sacrifice. We sacrificed. Don't you think we didn't. And we sacrificed time, money and blood.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Not necessarily in that order.

*Sid Conley:* That's right.

*Interviewer:* Can I ask you a sort of silly question? When I – we're on the tape recorder. If there's a TV going usually it just picks up the TV and not somebody's voice. Can I shut the door there?

*Sid Conley:* Well, I'll just have him turn it off.

*Interviewer:* No. He doesn't have to turn it off. I'll just shut the door so it won't, the sound won't come through.

*Female:* Close the door Teddy, Gregory.

*Sid Conley:* Tell him turn it down.

*Female:* Arrested in the telephone.

*Interviewer:* It's the damndest thing, it's really the awfulest thing that like a lot of times I'll get home and –

*Female:* They've gone back to the house. I'll just turn it off. They broke their door and...

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*Interviewer:* That's what happens when you have kids around.

*Female:* And the outside bugs are coming in and I've been trying to knock them out.

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Female:* I don't have nothing to spray them with.

*Interviewer:* You were telling me that back in 1919 the union organizer had come down here from Pennsylvania and handed out literature and all.

*Sid Conley:* Now I don't know. It was 19 in Pennsylvania when I believe they come from Pennsylvania. I don't know where they came from to tell you exactly the truth about it. But anyhow they was always Cabin Creek was already organized. That's over above Charleston. You know where Cabin Creek is I guess.

*Interviewer:* Sure. Well, I'm from Charleston. But I've talked to some people at Cabin Creek also.

*Sid Conley:* Well, now that's where that big massacre all happened at. These fellows, these thugs, Logan and went over there and killed a lot of them people and shot them and labeled them like they were civilians of some kind, dogs or something and these yellow backs we called them, thugs. Don Chatham hired them. Don Chatham showed up here at that time. And he hired them to go over there and do that. They paid him so much a ton to get the union out.

*Female:* Don't turn the television on because she'll pick up...

*Interviewer:* Well, that's what I understood that Chatham got this royalty to go in there and get the deputy sheriffs.

*Sid Conley:* Don Chatham, they paid him ten cents a ton. That's what I was told. I don't know it to be a fact. But I was told her got ten cents a ton of all the coal they run out of here to keep the union out. Well, I'll tell you one thing. It took us off of starvation, put us on a new life and give us something to live on. When they organized I was working. I was making \$5.85 a day for eight hours. That's what I was making when the union come in. Company work, that's the highest paid company work was. And it just kept going up and going up and going up and you see where it is today. Last money, work I did, I made \$22.25 for eight hours, quarter to quarter.

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*Interviewer:* Now some of the men are making up to 50.

*Sid Conley:* 42 something.

*Female:* Daddy worked for nothing when he worked.

*Sid Conley:* 42, the classified labor is \$42.85. I keep that – now this next month they're supposed to get two more dollars and something, \$2.85 more I think it is or \$2.85 raise in this coming month, next month. But just watched though the president's got on that high cost of living. You know what I mean? Of inflation. I seen in the paper where they wasn't going to allow them to raise it. They wasn't going to allow them to have that \$2.85.

*Interviewer:* That sucks.

*Sid Conley:* I don't know.

*Interviewer:* That cost of living thing, that wage price control has been pretty hard labor. That's my feeling.

*Sid Conley:* Well, there's one way it's going to really be hard on them. But now just turn it right around and reverse it right back. I was making \$22.25 for eight hours. Well, now you figure that up a little bit and five days a week and then turn right around and drop you back to have to live on \$234.00 a month.

*Female:* Sure looks like you're making very much.

*Sid Conley:* \$234.00 then see how you like 10:52. Then meet the high cost of living. Huh?

*Female:* He's busy right now.

*Interviewer:* I was going to ask you a minute ago. When you said your friend from Pennsylvania or wherever he was from –

*Sid Conley:* Yeah. He's from Pennsylvania.

*Interviewer:* When he came down here and was talking to the guys about the union, I was wondering if most of them were for it, if most of them were pretty sympathetic to the union and thought it was a good idea?

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*Sid Conley:* Oh yeah. They didn't have no trouble to organize at all after they got in here. But the trouble was they wouldn't allow them to come in, the officers, the deputies and –

*Female:* About the time \_\_\_\_\_ would have been.

*Sid Conley:* Ones in power wouldn't allow them to come in. And if an organizer come in here he disappeared. They didn't know where he went to, see?

*Interviewer:* Did you know cases where that happened? Where organizers were run out?

*Sid Conley:* Well, I was right here. I would know something about it.

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Sid Conley:* This Cooper boy man he was raised around the \_\_\_\_\_. His parents, he lived, he was raised around there but he immigrated over there into Pennsylvania. You know how young men do. He immigrated over there and went over there, got him a job in the Pennsylvania, northern part of Pennsylvania in the coal field. Then he they sent him over in here, you see.

They was wanting to spread out and organize and they sent him over in here just like Roosevelt. John L Lewis sent that man from Washington down here. He come down here and stayed and got the sympathy of all the people, come right here, talked to us and went house to house and asked us what we thought would be the best things for people to do, what they thought about the union. You think organized labor would help or you think \_\_\_\_\_?

*Interviewer:* Now this was after Roosevelt got elected as president?

*Sid Conley:* Just shortly afterwards.

*Interviewer:* Gee. That's real interesting to me. So the guys came down from Washington.

*Sid Conley:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Came around your house.

*Sid Conley:* Came down from Washington.

*Interviewer:* What type of suggestions did you give him?

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*Sid Conley:* Well, we just come blank and bold and told him yes. I said I'm doing too much time for the amount of money that I'm making and I said that I'm not making anything. And I said I believed that the union would help. If we get a union we could get shorter hours.

*Female:* Like I told everybody got everything out of it besides really.

*Sid Conley:* We got the union but we never got everything else besides. My way of seeing it we got just what we ordered. 'Cause now you know there's expenses to anything. You take any organization has expenses. They had to have backing. They had to have money to keep their officers and take care of their affairs just like a publishing company. Now if you worked for a paper company they've got to pay them people to publish this, to print this material. And you've got to buy your material. You've got to buy your machinery. It takes – you could have money to operate on.

*Interviewer:* So you're saying this about the union that they had to –

*Sid Conley:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* To pay to get what you got.

*Sid Conley:* Mama thinks that because we had to pay dues that she didn't see the money come in. She didn't want me to pay the due.

*Female:* \$50.00 initiation fee and \$5.00 a month.

*Sid Conley:* You've got to pay to keep it running.

*Female:* Took all the money.

*Sid Conley:* You pay \$5.00 a month now.

*Female:* Now they're making good money now.

*Sid Conley:* I paid a \$1.25. Just what I paid.

*Female:* We got one boy works in the mines. James, he works in the mines. And the other two, the baby one he's been in service and works on the road.

*Sid Conley:* He'd be a good fellow for you to talk to.

*Female:* James works in the mines, him and his son Brady.

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*Interviewer:* So –

*Sid Conley:* Yeah. If I was to go back or if I was to be in the working class now I'd recommend the boys to hold what they got. And there's nothing I don't think –

*Female:* There wouldn't be a bar if they didn't have the union.

*Sid Conley:* I don't know what they'd do if they didn't have protection.

*Female:* Working, work now.

*Sid Conley:* I'd tell them they'd go right back just like they was.

*Interviewer:* Just a minute. The two of you are talking at once and I can't hear you both when you talk at once. So you've got to talk one at a time or I won't hear either one of you.

*Sid Conley:* Oh you're trying to actually memorize what we told.

*Interviewer:* No. I'm just trying to listen is all.

*Sid Conley:* Yeah. All right.

*Interviewer:* Did John L Lewis ever come down here himself in 1933 or?

*Sid Conley:* No. John L Lewis never was in Logan County. He was afraid to come here.

*Interviewer:* Why was that?

*Sid Conley:* He just – I don't know. He never did come. Tony Bowles was here till this Casterfield we heard at console number nine. He went down in here then.

*Interviewer:* Wasn't down here I'm told in '22 either.

*Sid Conley:* No. He wasn't here then. He sent representatives. He wasn't down here then.

*Interviewer:* So when the organizers came in here in '33, the men were very responsive.

*Sid Conley:* They're responsive and after they seen that the government, the president was behind it – and he ordered the men protected, you

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see, that's come in here. He give them protection. He sent plain clothes men with the organizer, the person that come in here. When the first one come in here they throwed him in jail and when he first come in here he come in here by himself and the throwed him in jail. And I don't know how he got the message out. And they turned him out right now.

But he got the message back some way and they turned him loose right now and then they put, they sent the FBI, I mean plain clothes men with him till they got everything straightened out and got the membership of the people, the consent of the people. Well, they had blanks with them and you signed that. You signed your name to that piece of paper blank as consent to the union. And 90 percent of the men signed up with the union.

Well, it weren't just a few days till they begin to organize and the men understood it, know how to handle it. Elect a president and then the committees and so on. And they got more than just a few days till they was having private meetings. And after they got to having private meetings well, wasn't just a few days in till everything got rolling. And the company seen they was doomed. Well, they seen they was doomed and they was going to have to pay by the ton for their coal. Well, they had to pay for so much men. They had to pay so much a ton for the coal shot down. I mean that the men loaded and the coal was shot down. The \_\_\_\_18:27\_\_\_\_ furnished them powder to shoot the coal, mean loading coal.

Well, that went on about – let's see, '34 I believe it was when they put the first loading machine in, '34. And they turned in and the Jeffrey Manufacturing Company sent a man in here then to mechanize the mines, to see why they would want to put the machinery in. So they got in the Allen Creek and started it. And they put one loading machine in number one mine was the first mine that they put a loading machine. They put it in on the weekend and put it in there on the weekend. We didn't know nothing about it till Monday morning. We come in Monday morning and they had their loading machine already in there because they was afraid that they was going to resist it.

And so they put it in and after they got it in there they knowed they had the men fired anyway. And they started from one. That was a little one. That didn't do no good. And they went on just a little while and they fetched a bigger one in. That time they got two. And then done the work and they started curtailing the men off, cutting the men off, laying the men off. So many. One of them loading machines took the place of 250 men. That's what they took

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the place of. One loading machine took the place of 250 hand loaders.

*Interviewer:* How many people did it take to operate one of those machines?

*Sid Conley:* The first ones that came in here, it took 21 men. 21 men was approved. They kept cutting that down, kept cutting that down. And the last report now, the last report I got now from the boys they got 9 men in the place now operating it. They cut it down from 21 men in 1940, '38. '39 up to about the first of '40. They cut it down from 21 men down now to 9 men.

*Interviewer:* But it was starting as early as '34. Then they started laying guys off because they brought the machines in.

*Sid Conley:* Yeah. They started – just as soon as they know that they was going to have to pay by the ton and they know as the union advanced they was paying around Pennsylvania spend around \$4.00 a ton at that time. And coal was – that's what they was getting for loading coal, \$4.00 a ton. So that Allen Creek knows they was going to come, do the same thing and they put them loading machines in.

*Interviewer:* So it was kind of like a defense against the union almost.

*Sid Conley:* Oh yeah.

*Interviewer:* Or having to pay wages. I see.

*Sid Conley:* Oh they done everything in the world they could to block. They offered – they tried. They done every way in the world to keep the union out but they just couldn't over do it. We both – we lost 52 days, highest 52 days work at one time on the grievance. Stay out 52 days till we got it.

*Interviewer:* What grievance was that? Do you remember what they said it was?

*Sid Conley:* Well, it was the provisions about the working conditions, about portal to portal and taking the, working the overtime, working on the tipper – one time was on the tipper. They was working the tipper men. They say now they put the tipper men on to work and they rotate them tipped men. One bunch came on at 7:00 and another bunch would come on at 10:00. And some of them would come on maybe at 1:00 or 2:00. They'd hold them till they run that tipper right on up till they completed their eight hours you see and run the tipper about 15 hours a day. Well, we struck – that's when

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we had the 52 days. We wanted them to put the third shift on. We wanted them to give the men more work.

*Interviewer:* Sure. Did you win the grievance?

*Sid Conley:* No. We didn't win it. We stopped, we cut it down to eight hours.

*Interviewer:* When was that that happened? Do you remember?

*Sid Conley:* That was in the '40s. That was in the '40s, about '42 or '43.

*Interviewer:* During the war.

*Sid Conley:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* It must have been a lot of adverse publicity to be going on strike during the war time. I know – I remember – of course I wasn't even living then but my father has told me about how the newspapers came down real hard on John L Lewis for calling on strikes during the war.

*Sid Conley:* Oh they called him everything in the world and they even fined him and fined him. I forget, old man Goldberg found him a \_\_\_\_\_. He just smiled and said we'll make it back. Well, you know what he done? He took, he just rode around and paid that fine from the men. The men paid the fine. John, he didn't pay nothing. He collected that from the men. That \$250,000.00 he paid, they assessed us \$20.00 a piece for that. We paid that.

*Interviewer:* Well, it was good to know that everybody was pretty solid behind him though.

*Sid Conley:* Oh everybody still solid behind him. But they like to see this corruption started down a little bit. And I think, I think Tony Bowles has learned his lesson. And I told the boys from down here when we had our election here last month. I told the boys. I said I believe that Tony Bowles was ignorant and what he done, I don't believe he had anything to do with it. I don't believe he was at money misplaced intentionally at all. I'll explain just to you.

Here at Logan now I've had some kinsfolks that's worked for the Board of Education and worked for them down there. Now they've got a flower fund. They call it flower fund and they keep it working all the time. You go down there and keep you a job teaching school. You've got to pay so much a month to what you earn to the board that holds it out. \$5.00 they said for the flower

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fund. That's all you know. I had a step-grandson worked down there and he told me. He said, "Pa, they take out \$5.00 on a flower fund." Said, "What's that for?" I said, "That's election money." He said, "What?" I said, "That's election money." I said, "That's put in. They pool that and they put that on every employee has to pay \$5.00 a month." That pool right around comes right back in and comes right back into the headquarters down there.

*Interviewer:* Is that so?

*Sid Conley:* That's right, the headquarters.

*Interviewer:* And they don't even ask these guys. They just dock their paycheck.

*Sid Conley:* Huh?

*Interviewer:* They just dock their paychecks and take their money for this corruption?

*Sid Conley:* That's exactly what they do.

*Interviewer:* Honest to god.

*Sid Conley:* They work these employees. And now here as a union, union does, how the union does. The international union, they only allow \$0.25 to the dollar at our little local down here. They keep \$0.25 to the dollar is what they keep. Well, all the rest of it goes over to Charleston and then it goes into district headquarters. Well, now that district headquarters they send so much a month into the international union. You know what I'm saying? They international union, they've got a flower fund. They've got flower fund but that's what every local, every district 17, 19, 20, 31, 32 up to 29 all of them sends in every district sends in so much what they call it, how many men they got.

*Interviewer:* Are you saying that the union money is used for elections?

*Sid Conley:* They always did use it. They always did.

*Interviewer:* Well, you know this 1969 court case.

*Sid Conley:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Said that –

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*Sid Conley:* Did you – you never read the journal, did you ever see \_\_\_\_\_?

*Interviewer:* Yeah. I've read it. And I understand that the court case they just, the same court case that overruled the 1969 election where Yoblonski was defeated. The same one that declared they had to have the new election in December. That court case also said that well, that neither international officers nor district officers can use union money for campaign purposes.

*Sid Conley:* They did it. That's what I said, isn't it? They thought they had – you take your counties and your states. They do the same thing. That's why I was asking you if know who was in behind it and they do the same thing right there.

*Interviewer:* That doesn't make it right though.

*Sid Conley:* Well, it don't make it right but anything that's been done. And he was already come up under the impression of that. They thought it was right. Well, now you turn right around the journal said he used it for the support Humphrey. You see? He's wanting a Democrat president. He put in \$30,000.00 on a campaign fund to elect Humphrey in '69. He said –

*Female:* He had enough brothers to help him out in that.

*Sid Conley:* Oh yeah. But we were talking about the, talking about using this money, this corruption, how it was worked about and how it come and so on. But now they didn't think – they never thought about violating any labor law. See. They didn't – always hearing of Ford. John L Lewis done the same trick.

*Interviewer:* Well, maybe they're just a little more stringent about it these days.

*Sid Conley:* They just come out and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and they was – the way I look at it there's a lot of operators got in behind this and they're just trying to break the union. That's what I would think, the way I look at it.

*Interviewer:* Well, I figure that this election is going to be pretty fair because the Department of Labor is going to be supervising it. And I figure that whichever way it comes out it will be the way the miners want it.

*Sid Conley:* These men that was down here said.

*[End of Audio]*

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